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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001015

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: DISQUALIFIED COMBATANTS WON'T LEAVE SOON

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Classified By: Charge d' Affaires, a.i., Randy Berry. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Despite repeated promises, the Maoists are unlikely to allow the discharge of 4,008 disqualified former combatants anytime soon. Maoist internal strategy is confused and focused on retaking government. Negotiations on integration and rehabilitation of the 19,602 verified Maoist combatants have stalled completely. End Summary.

Discharge Process Only Looks Promising on Paper

¶2. (C) An UNMIN official serving on the technical committee for discharging disqualified combatants, Mohd Rashid Iraqi, told Emboffs on November 5 that the discharge process for disqualified applicants is only in phase one of a six phase plan. Initial results from phase one ("group consultations") have been mixed. The disqualified are amenable to leaving the cantonments--despite grumbling about not being able to join the Nepal Army--and are willing to discuss rehabilitation packages. UNMIN, in coordination with UNDP and UNICEF, are offering approximately 60 different rehabilitation and retraining options. Programs range from bee keeping to nursing, but focus heavily on vocational training. The combatants are open to these programs, but are also demanding college-level education programs and job guarantees. They originally demanded financial payments, but recently requested they be given land for collective farming. The UN is willing to discuss collective farming, but Iraqi said the government strongly opposes plans to give the disqualified financial packages of any sort, including land.

¶3. (C) During phase two of the discharge process, the UN and Peace Ministry will meet individually with all 4,008 disqualified combatants. The group will make a profile for each applicant, and use the profiles to determine final rehabilitation packages. The government originally hoped to move the disqualified combatants to transition centers by November 19, before the interviews, but Iraqi said this is no longer feasible. He doubted anybody would leave the camps before January 22, 2010, at the earliest. The Norwegian government committed USD 5 million of the roughly USD 15 million estimated budget for the discharge process, on the condition that the combatants begin leaving the cantonments

by January 22--also the date that the UNSC will review UNMIN's mandate.

¶4. (C) After the individual profile phase, the combatants will go through an official Maoist military discharge ceremony and move into transition centers. After staying in the centers for three to 45 days, the UN will send the combatants to attend the various training programs throughout Nepal. This training phase could take between several weeks and two years, based on the individual's needs. The final step, according to Iraqi, is a government program to monitor the progress of the disqualified combatants, and ensure they have reintegrated into society successfully.

Maoists Fear Losing Their Team

¶5. (C) Iraqi said the Maoists have two major concerns regarding the discharge process. First, many of the disqualified combatants played active military roles during the conflict and are considered valuable assets. The Maoists fear they will lose control of these individuals if they are separated from Maoist command for a long retraining program. This fear has led them to push for short-term training and for collective farming, which would keep their cadres together as a unit. The Maoist leaders also feel they have a "moral obligation" to help guarantee the future of the disqualified combatants as a reward for their service to the Maoist party.

Integration and Rehabilitation Still a Distant Dream

¶6. (C) According to Iraqi, work on integration and rehabilitation of verified Maoist combatants has ground to a

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halt since the Technical Committee on Rehabilitation and Integration presented a plan for government supervision of Maoist cantonments in mid-September. Maoist representatives on the committee accepted the plan, but the Maoist leadership strongly opposed it. As a result of the disagreement, Iraqi said the Maoists have reshuffled nearly all of their members on the four committees handling the future of Maoist combatants, and are currently completely disorganized. Due to the confusion in Maoist strategy, there has been no discussion within UNMIN regarding future plans for integration and rehabilitation of verified combatants. UNMIN is now focusing solely on the discharge process for disqualified combatants.

¶7. (C) In a separate meeting November 5, Indra Jit Rai, the Maoist representative to the Technical Committee who approved the supervision plan, confirmed Iraqi's assessment. Rai said the Maoist leaders moved him and other members to different committees, however half the members have refused their assignments. Rai and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka "Prachanda" disagreed on the monitoring plan.

Current Status of The Verified Combatants

¶8. (C) On the 19,602 verified combatants, Iraqi estimated that, at most, several hundred have permanently deserted the cantonments. (Note: other reports suggest a much higher "desertion" rate. End note.) Since the verification process was completed in 2007, the government of Nepal has paid the cantoned former combatants NRs 5,000 in salary per month and NRs 3,000 for rations (just over USD 100 total). The government originally gave the funds to the Maoist cantonment commanders. After allegations Maoist leaders were siphoning funds though, the government began issuing checks to each individual in the cantonment.

Comment

¶9. (C) The slow progress on the discharge of the disqualified combatants is disheartening, if predictable. As with other peace process issues, the Maoists are not fully committed,

and are likely to drag out any substantial progress in the
near term.
BERRY